Second Reaction: Motivating Students to Reflect and Respond by Employing *The Cuckoo's Haiku*

Rosen, Michael J. Illus. Stan Fellows. *The Cuckoo's Haiku and Other Birding Poems*. Somerville, Massachusetts: Candlewick, 2009.

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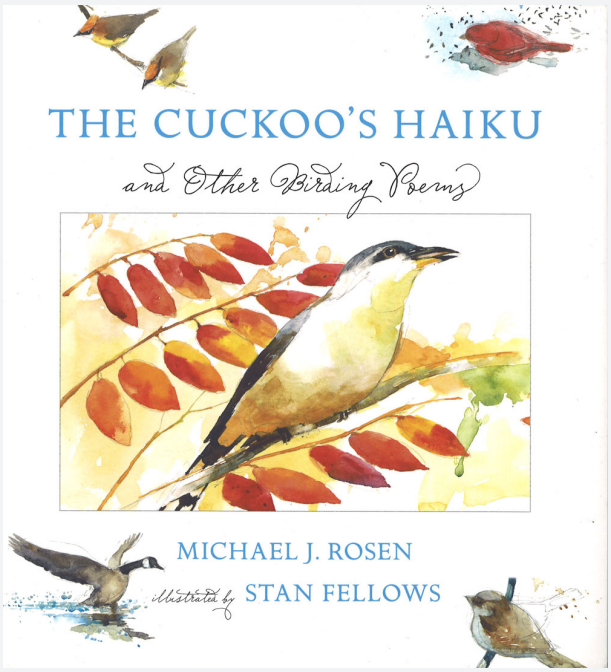

The Cuckoo's Haiku, written by Michael Rosen and illustrated by Stan Fellows, is a charming and clever collection of twenty-four haiku poems that relate directly to Mr. Rosen's passion for birding. The collection lends itself to classroom instruction as an opportunity to introduce students to the reflective and precise nature of haiku as well as affording the teacher the opportunity to invite students to create their own haiku poems.

Rosen has authored about seventy-five books, most of which have a theme of wildlife. He emphasizes that bird watching and haiku are like "fleeting impressions" of a subject, however, if the watching is prolonged then something astonishing can be called to mind (endpage).

The main characters of this book are twenty-four common North American birds, which have been grouped and assigned to one of four seasons. Also included is an appendix that is formatted like a bird watcher's journal.

I would use this book as a way of introducing students to this Japanese form of poetry in which the theme is usually nature and seasonal imagery. Haiku evokes the five senses in creating imagery and emotion. It avoids rhyme, but follows a pattern of 17 syllables with three lines of five, seven, and five syllables respectively. Haiku asks writers to use words sparingly and carefully. Students can be either outside or in the classroom, observing a natural element that the teacher has brought to them: for instance, a collection of fall leaves.

Students in grades three to five should spend some time brainstorming words that are indicative of the seasons. By using this book as a read-aloud, students in grades one to five may learn the names, the habits, or physical features of birds. A discussion of this book may also serve as a bridge to a writing project for older students; one which explores the rules of haiku, uses word associations, compares or contrasts images. Writers use the five senses to show rather than tell.

Rosen is a master of surprising the reader with his vision through text, inviting us to share his visions throughout. He sees what we do not. For instance, about the spring blue bird he writes:

"on a staff of wires
blue notes inked from April skies
truly, spring's first song" (unpaged).

I now can imagine "blue notes" falling from the skies and settling on the wires, but Fellows' watercolor enhances my vision. There, sitting on a musical staff of five lines (wires), sit five bluebirds that appear to be those blue notes. How clever! I am eager to share my discoveries with my grandchildren.

Lily, my five-year-old, says the birds on the cover are like the fall leaves on the cover because "they are noisy." We are now taking a picture walk through the book to call attention to the birds and the seasons. She named the hummingbird and noticed that the "duck" (goose) had a long neck. She knew that the four seasons were "spring, winter, fall, Halloween, and Christmas." The bluebird looked like "blueberries on the wire" and she didn't know that "gooses" flew. She thought that the eagle was a crow, but then discovered that since it didn't have a white head, it couldn't be an eagle. She knew the yellow bird was a "goldfish" (finch). She asked, "Have I ever seen a crow?" Her questions seemed to come after we have gone on in our discussion, so I knew she was pondering the information gained thus far.

With Zoe, age nine, I approached our discussion differently, sharing the format and letting her read the names of the birds under each season. She saw the wire, where the bluebirds sat, as telephone lines or strings on a harp. The "v" of the goose formation was a boomerang. She observed that when a goose lands it splashes then glides, as she focused

on both the text and the illustration. She told me that she had seen a goldfinch at my house and that the dove was on a windowsill, as the poem states. She explained that the reason the poem says "no breeze comes inside" (unpaged) means the people were hot, but they didn't want to disturb the nest. We read the spring poems and counted syllables to make sure that each followed the pattern.

When we had finished reading I thought we were through, but she looked out the window and said, "The squirrel is in the tree," beginning her own haiku.

We counted one syllable too many, so I asked her to eliminate an unimportant word and tell me the color of the squirrel so that I could picture it more clearly. Her next line was easier for her because she saw the squirrel in a different way: "a performer on a tightrope." She ended by giving that same squirrel some advice: "Stay there till the dawn." Her haiku read as follows:

"Brown squirrel on a limb
Performer on a tightrope
Stay there till the dawn."

She ran to read it to Grampy John.

I believe this beautiful book to be informative as well as motivational for both children and adults. Its illustrations enhance the text and allow younger children to "see" even if they can't understand the text. I guess it motivated me because the next time I drove by the pond where the neighborhood geese hang out, I saw them as "a feathered armada."

About the Author

Ann Koci has taught self-contained classrooms in Tippecanoe County and fifth and sixth grade language arts in Houston, Texas. She is presently a limited term lecturer in the School of Education, Curriculum and Instruction, at Purdue University.